



**STRATEGY
RESEARCH
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**ADMIRAL CHESTER W. NIMITZ'S STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP
DURING WORLD WAR II**

BY

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ABSTRACT

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Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, as Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Area during World War II, commanded the most powerful naval force ever assembled and was arguably the individual most responsible for the Allied victory in that theater. His unique abilities serve well as a model for all who aspire to fill a strategic leadership role. Some of his competencies were derived from natural ability, while others were learned, and honed, through education, training, and experience. This report analyzes Admiral Nimitz's strategic leader competencies and evaluates his contributions in achieving a total victory in the Pacific for the Allied powers.

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PREFACE

A special thanks to my wife Vicky, who has shared the Navy with me for all my 20 years, and Matthew and Amanda, who have been part of both of these families for 14 and 10 years, respectively.

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ADMIRAL CHESTER W. NIMITZ'S STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP DURING WORLD WAR II

Leadership is the process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation.¹

As both Commander-in-Chief (CINC), Pacific Fleet and CINC, Pacific Ocean Area during World War II, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz commanded the most powerful naval force ever assembled. Admiral Nimitz's accomplishments speak for themselves in qualifying him as one of the greatest strategic leaders of the twentieth-century - he defeated the Japanese fleet to achieve victory in the Pacific theater for the Allies. The object of this paper is to look at Admiral Nimitz's leadership style and determine the leadership traits or competencies that he possessed, and to what degree.

This analysis is useful for two reasons. First, as Colonel Marland J. Burckhardt states, "there are observable competency differences between superior and average performers."² And secondly, as the U.S. Army War College Strategic Leadership Primer comments, "a competency may be based on natural ability or may be derived from education, training, or experience."³ If there is a distinct difference in performance and the traits can indeed be learned, or taught, the advantages of investigating them are obvious.

LEVEL OF COMMAND

In order to evaluate Admiral Nimitz's leadership traits I will begin by looking at two areas: first, I will determine the level at which Admiral Nimitz operated as CINC Pacific Fleet and CINC Pacific Ocean Area, and then select the most appropriate leadership traits to use for analysis. During World War II, the United States Pacific Command (CINCPAC) didn't exist, so as CINC, Pacific Ocean Area, Admiral Nimitz was a geographic, warfighting CINC - clearly a unified combatant commander in today's vernacular. It therefore wouldn't require too great a leap to assume that he operated at the strategic level, but I'll utilize the Universal Joint Task List (UJTL), Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Manual 3500.04A, to validate this assertion.

The UJTL defines three levels of war - tactical, operational, and strategic. It's obvious that the tactical level is inappropriately low, so I'll concentrate on the two higher levels. The operational level is "the level of war at which campaigns and major operations are planned, conducted, and sustained to accomplish strategic objectives within theaters of operations."⁴ The strategic level "is the level of war at which a nation, often as a member of a group of nations, determines national or multinational security objectives and guidance, and develops and uses national resources to accomplish objectives."⁵ At first blush, one could make the quick assertion that Admiral

Nimitz, as well as Generals Eisenhower and MacArthur, were operating at the operational, vice strategic level. But these definitions are "today's" definitions, and a lot has changed in the Unified Command and Joint Staff structures and duties since World War II. The UJTL provides further guidance and criteria in assisting with this determination.

The UJTL divides the strategic level into two categories; strategic level - national military tasks, and strategic level - theater tasks. It then lists the aims/objectives to be accomplished at each level, which can be utilized to determine the appropriate level of performance for my analysis.⁶ The table below lists the aims/objectives of the three highest levels of war.

Table 1: RELATIONSHIP OF LEVELS OF WAR TO AIMS OR OBJECTIVES⁷

STRATEGIC NATIONAL	STRATEGIC THEATER	OPERATIONAL
Conduct Strategic Deployment & Redeployment	Deploy, Concentrate & Maneuver Theater Forces	Conduct Operational Movement & Maneuver
Develop Strategic Intel, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance	Develop Theater Strategic Intel, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance	Provide Operational Intel, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance
Employ Forces	Employ Theater Strategic Firepower	Employ Operational Firepower
Provide Sustainment	Sustain Theater Forces	Provide Operational Support
Provide Strategic Direction & Integration	Provide Theater Strategic Command & Control	Exercise Operational Command & Control
Conduct Mobilization	Provide Theater Protection	Provide Operational Protection

Conduct Force Development	Establish Theater Force Requirements & Readiness	
Foster Multinational & Interagency Relations	Develop & Maintain Alliance & Regional Relations	

These tasks were as relevant during World War II as they are today, and from those listed in the table it is readily apparent that Admiral Nimitz, as the CINC Pacific Ocean Area, operated at the strategic-theater level of war. The UJTL further validates this by stating that "the combatant commander normally operates at the strategic level of war, applying the military element of power ... to achieve the desired military end state within the strategic end state determined by national security or strategic military objectives and guidance."⁸ This describes most appropriately the level of command exercised by Admiral Nimitz, along with the other theater CINCs, during World War II. Now to the 'brass tacks' - leadership competencies.

As CINC Pacific Fleet and CINC Pacific Ocean Area, Admiral Nimitz had a very short chain-of-command, which was: Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (Admiral Ernest J. King); Commander, Joint Chiefs of Staff (Admiral William D. Leahy); and the President.⁹ Admiral King was also dual hatted, he was the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), and therefore a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as well as CINC, U.S. Fleet, which also gave him a seat on World War II's Combined Chiefs of Staff. Nimitz's

relationship with King was similar to the one shared by General Douglas MacArthur and General George C. Marshall with respect to strategic direction and strategy development.

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

There are literally hundreds of lists of leadership traits available. Countless books about management and leadership are on the market - and each author has his own idea as to what qualities are most important in a leader. But the military isn't corporate America, and therefore requires different qualities from their leaders - especially the warfighting commanders. Command is a concept that is unique to the military. Colonel Burckhardt notes that: "The commander will not find in management theory the insights and values that can explain to soldiers why their organization is more important than they are, why it can be sacrificed to national ... need, and whether they may live or die in the process."¹⁰ For this reason I will use the United States Army War College's list, taken from its Strategic Leadership Primer.

The Leadership Primer provides the following definition: "Competencies are the knowledge, skills, attributes, and capacities which enable a leader to perform his required tasks."¹¹ Many of the skills/competencies required at the strategic level are the same as those required at lower levels. But many strategic-leader competencies are qualitatively

different, if not totally unique.¹² There are three categories of leadership competencies - conceptual, technical, and interpersonal. These are the competencies that will be utilized to analyze Admiral Nimitz's leadership, and therefore will be looked at individually.

It must be noted that there are differences between competencies required by national strategic-level leaders and theater strategic-level leaders. These differences are exacerbated by time periods and "theaters of operation" - specifically between the 'political' arena of today's national strategic-level leaders (the individuals to whom these strategic leadership competencies most directly apply), and the theater strategic-level leaders (warfighting CINCs) of World War II. The following excerpt from the Draft FM 22-103 aptly describes this, by looking at the changes required in United States national security strategy following World War II:

For the United States, however, the transformation in national security strategy occurred in the rapidly unfolding events after World War II with the adjustment not only to international involvement in peacetime, but to the mantle of global leadership as well. National security strategy now emerged as something infinitely more complex and multilayered for American leaders, involving all national elements of power to form long-term domestic and foreign policies.¹³

CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCIES

Strategic conceptual competencies are the thinking skills that a leader requires to understand and effectively deal with the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA - as our acronym-rich military language refers to it) strategic environment. From numerous alternatives the strategic-level leader must have the skills and foresight to select the one that provides the best long-term solution. To help accomplish this, strategic conceptual competencies include frame of reference development, problem management, and envisioning the future.¹⁴

A leader's frame of reference is developed from a lifetime of experience and learning. This frame of reference, forms the template through which the leader views the environment, dissects problems, and discriminates between alternative solutions. The more well-developed the leader's frame of reference, the more effectively they can operate in the VUCA strategic environment.¹⁵

In the strategic arena there are no easy answers - each problem comes with many competing issues. Since simple, direct courses of action don't exist, problem management involves constant, careful adjustments throughout the entire process. The leader must have the foresight to discard impertinent data and inhibiting alternatives, and ultimately select the optimal

long-term solution.¹⁶ On problem management, Thomas E. Cronin writes:

The strength of leaders often lies in their tenacity, in knowing how to deal with competing factions, knowing when to compromise, when to amplify conflict, and when to move an organization or a community away from paralyzing divisiveness and toward a vision of the common good.¹⁷

With numerous competing alternatives and ambiguous, incomplete information, effective risk management is paramount. In operating in areas of uncertainties, acceptance of some degree of risk is essential.¹⁸ This requires the ability to recognize and seize opportunities when the potential gain outweighs the risks. Here John Paul Jones may have hit the mark when he said "He who will not risk cannot win." Today we have a process called Operational Risk Management to apply - in World War II the leader was on his own.

On the importance of vision, the Leadership Primer comments, "The capability to formulate and articulate strategic aims and key concepts is perhaps the strategic leader's most significant capacity."¹⁹ The strategic leader must fully understand the interaction of ends, ways, and means in orchestrating a strategy. In visioning, the leader provides the direction, purpose, and motivation to the achievement of the organization's ultimate long-term goals.²⁰

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

The technical competencies required at the strategic level are distinctly different than those demanded at the organization level. At the strategic level, the leader must go beyond understanding the internal processes and integration of their own organization. They must also understand how their organizations fit into the political and social systems that they are a part of. The strategic leader must possess the tools to effectively engage in the interdepartmental process - only then can they fully participate in national policy and strategy development. The strategic-level leader also requires the ability to seamlessly perform joint and combined operations, especially in the role of warfighter.²¹

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES

To be successful at the strategic level, leaders must be quintessential communicators. Often operating in an arena without clear subordination, the strategic leader must be skilled in peer leadership. And when competing to be heard in policy and strategy development, they must be persuasive consensus-builders and negotiators.

At the strategic-level, consensus- building and negotiation are frequent, and necessary tools. Often working with peers to resolve complex issues - direction isn't an option, and

consensus is a requirement. This requires the ability to persuasively, and succinctly present an argument, and get your point across.²² With numerous views brought to the table, equally as important as being capable of presenting one's own case, one must be able to effectively diagnose the other views presented.²³ Without both abilities, one comes under-gunned to the negotiation table, and unable to achieve the synergism competing arguments afford. In addition, it is equally imperative to know when not to compromise. General Chilcoat provides this thought on compromise: "In strategy, then, there is a time to dictate, order, and demand, but also a time to persuade, cajole, and build consensus. Strategic leaders must understand the difference and know the time for each."²⁴

The importance of expert communicative skills to the strategic leader should now be evident. Spanning the entire realm of communication medium, communications must be clear and concise - misperception cannot be afforded. On its relative importance, the Leadership Primer states: "Communicating in a brief, clear, and persuasive manner - a considerable challenge when dealing in a vague, uncertain environment - is a competency strategic leaders must master."²⁵

THE EARLY YEARS - PRE-WORLD WAR II

Before looking at Admiral Nimitz's leadership during World War II, one must 'begin at the beginning,' as his leadership skills started to develop long before then. His naval career began when he graduated number seven in a class of 114 from the Naval Academy in 1905, and earned his commission as an ensign in January 1907. His experience in command began immediately when he was assigned as Commanding Officer of the gunboat PANAY, and then the destroyer DECATUR - at the age of 22. This was unique, as biographer E. B. Potter writes:

Twenty-two-year-old ensigns are not now and were not then normally given command of destroyers, even in times of grave emergency. Among Nimitz's contemporaries destined for highest ranks, Spruance had his first destroyer command at the age of 26; Halsey, at the age of 30; King, at 36.²⁶

He followed that experience by commanding three submarines, wherein he also became an expert on diesel engines and the Navy's preeminent undersea warfare tactician. He later returned to surface warfare, where he commanded the cruiser AUGUSTA, and finally Battleship Division ONE. During his career he excelled in command at the operational level, perfecting all the leadership competencies required to operate there. But he was more than a leader, he was an innovator and tactical practitioner.

I have already mentioned that he became an expert in diesel and undersea warfare during his time in submarines. While Executive Officer of the oiler MAUMEE in 1917, he co-invented and introduced underway refueling, to this day a critical naval core capability. Nimitz would later comment: "This was the area where MAUMEE began the fueling-at-sea operations that gave our Navy the experience that was to prove invaluable in supplying mobile logistic support to our great fleets that crossed the Pacific in World War II and utterly destroy the Japanese Navy."²⁷ Two additional innovations of Nimitz's that proved visionary were the implementation of the circular formation, and the integration of the carrier, and its air power, into fleet maneuvers and operations. Both changes met with much resistance, but through Nimitz's persistence the carrier LANGLEY was exercised with the fleet utilizing the circular formation - "achieving perfect integration."²⁸ Forty years later Nimitz commented:

I regard the tactical exercises that we had at that time as laying the groundwork for the cruising formations that we used in World War II in the carrier air groups and practically every kind of task force that went out.²⁹

Potter puts Nimitz's lifetime of innovative achievements into historical perspective:

The tactical innovations introduced into the U.S. Fleet by Chester Nimitz are as epochal as the column formation that Oliver Cromwell's generals imposed on the English sailing fleet in the seventeenth century.³⁰

Along the way he was also selected as one of six officers to establish Naval Reserve Officers' Training Corps (NROTC) programs at American Universities. He established the unit at University of California at Berkeley.³¹ As can be seen, Admiral Nimitz didn't fall into his job as CINCPACFLT - he earned it with a career of unparalleled excellence, and his leadership came from a lifetime of education, experience, and action. After the devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt told the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox, to "Tell Nimitz to get the hell out to Pearl and stay there till the war is won."³² This order Nimitz followed to the letter.

NIMITZ - WORLD WAR II

Prior to my evaluation of Admiral Nimitz's leadership during World War II, and at the risk of providing my conclusion upfront, I give the floor to Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison. Admiral Morison was a historian who wrote the definitive fifteen volume history of naval operations in World War II, and this is his opinion on the importance of Nimitz's selection as that theater's warfighting CINC:

No more fortunate appointment to this vital command could have been made. He restored confidence to the defeated fleet. He had the patience to wait through the lean period of the war, the capacity to organize both a fleet and a vast theater, the tact to deal with sister services and Allied commands, the leadership to weld his own subordinates into a great fighting team, the courage to take necessary risks, and the wisdom to select, from a welter of intelligence and opinion, the strategy that defeated Japan.³³

Admiral Morison may have hit on all three competencies in one paragraph. I will now look at them one at a time, starting with conceptual competencies.

CONCEPTUAL COMPETENCIES

I consider this to be the most important leadership yardstick for a warfighting CINC - framing the problem (in a VUCA environment), applying the appropriate ways and means, and finally, leading the organization to the optimal solution (end). And this is where Admiral Nimitz was peerless. When developing his frame of reference, Nimitz left no stone unturned. His preparedness for a war in the Pacific started very early in his career. At the Naval War College, as well as during naval war games and exercises, Japan was always the potential enemy - and the Pacific Ocean the arena. Admiral Nimitz studied hard and learned well. He later wrote, "the enemy of our games was always - Japan - and the courses were so thorough that after the start of WW II - nothing that happened in the Pacific was strange or unexpected."³⁴

Admiral Nimitz fully understood the importance of correct intelligence and he exploited it at every opportunity. The Battle of Midway provides the best example. Nimitz's instinct told him that Midway would be the target of Japan's next attack, but both Admiral Ernest King and General Douglas MacArthur disagreed. King and MacArthur were both convinced that Japan's next move would be in the New Guinea - Solomon Islands area. In order to confirm his suspicion, Nimitz transmitted a message in the clear that Midway's water distillation plant had broken down. A subsequent Japanese message confirmed that Midway would be next. With this hard evidence in hand, Nimitz convinced King and MacArthur of Japan's intent and prepared for the Battle of Midway.³⁵

To complete his perspective, Nimitz openly sought out the opinions of all those around him - subordinates and peers alike. Time was set aside every afternoon for visitors, and during meetings everyone could expect to be called upon to provide their view. Potter describes his planning sessions this way:

At the planning sessions, Admiral Nimitz acted like a chairman of the board, guiding and being guided by others. This did not mean that the war was being run like a town meeting. Nimitz made the final decisions, sometimes despite contrary advice, but he heard the advice and weighed it carefully.³⁶

Nimitz himself said, "Some of the best help and advice I've had comes from junior officers and enlisted men."³⁷

With an Area of Responsibility (AOR) of sixty-five million square miles; responsibility for three fleets (3rd, 5th, and 7th) and thousands of ships; and command of forces from all three services; Admiral Nimitz was an expert at problem management. He empowered his subordinates, but he also demanded results. He told his commanders what he expected and why, but once 'underway' for a mission with "an approved operation plan," Nimitz refused to 'coach' - he let his commanders fight the battle without intervention³⁸ (some might say without "interference").

Nimitz utilized his two "fighting" fleet commanders, Admiral Halsey, Third Fleet, and Admiral Spruance, Fifth Fleet, superbly. Halsey and Spruance were cut from different cloth, and Nimitz realized this and used each for their strong points. More importantly, they fully understood what Nimitz expected of them. Halsey - bold, brash, and aggressive - concentrated on attacking the Japanese navy and their air power; while Spruance - cool, calculating, and methodical - was given responsibility for taking and holding territory, and providing protection from incursions of the Japanese fleet.³⁹

For a major portion of the war, the U.S. fleet was outnumbered by the Japanese fleet - in all categories and throughout the Pacific. Admiral Nimitz knew that advances by the American fleet would therefore require "calculated risk."

And Nimitz was expert at choosing the times and the places. After meticulously planning an operation, Admiral Nimitz would provide very explicit orders to his battle force commanders, but often times add instructions to allow, and help define, the commanders' use of tactical opportunities - risk management.

At the Battle of Midway, Admiral Yamamoto, greatly outnumbering the American fleet in all ship types - especially carriers and battleships - expected little, or no, opposition. But Nimitz held three trump cards - intelligence on the enemy's intentions, an air base on Midway, and radar. Holding these cards, Nimitz was confident that he could fight and win, despite "severely disadvantageous odds."⁴⁰ But it would be crucial to go for the jugular, as his operational instructions to his two carrier group commanders read - "to inflict maximum damage on the enemy by employing strong attrition tactics."⁴¹ Nimitz further added the following direction:

In carrying out the task assigned ... you will be governed by the principle of calculated risk, which you shall interpret to mean the avoidance of exposure of your force to attack by superior enemy forces without good prospect on inflicting, as a result of such exposure, greater damage on the enemy.⁴²

The resulting American victory was a turning point; it erased Japan's military advantage and allowed us to shift to the offensive. Larrabee provides a historical perspective on Midway: "The victory when it came was not only one of inferior

forces over superior but a stunning reversal in the tides of fortune, one of those passages at arms that turn the world around and send history off in a new direction."⁴³

At the Battle of the Philippine Sea, Nimitz's guidance almost backfired - but ultimately led to equally devastating results for the enemy. Admiral Nimitz included in his battle orders to Admiral Halsey the following: "In case opportunity for destruction of major portion of the enemy fleet is offered or can be created, *such destruction becomes the primary task.*" ⁴⁴ Some may have called this encouragement ill-advised, but Nimitz knew Halsey very well. Earlier in the war, Nimitz had said of Halsey, "He has that rare combination of intellectual capacity and military audacity, and can calculate to a cat's whisker the risk involved."⁴⁵ Halsey did in fact divert a portion of his task force from its primary mission; that of safeguarding MacArthur's landing at Leyte Gulf, to pursue a tactical opportunity. And he ultimately proved Nimitz the genius again - inflicted grave damage to the Japanese fleet. Potter provides this analysis of the devastation Halsey had wreaked upon the Japanese: "The Americans ... had utterly destroyed Japan's capacity to wage another fleet battle. In short, they had won uncontested command of the Pacific Ocean."⁴⁶ And MacArthur's forces had successful amphibious landings and a victorious campaign at Leyte.

To assist himself and his staff in efficiently attacking a problem, Nimitz had a sign in his office that bore three questions he expected them to be able to answer for any proposal put forward:

1. Is the proposed operation likely to succeed?
2. What might be the consequences of failure?
3. Is it in the realm of practicability of materials and supplies?⁴⁷

This was just one tool that Admiral Nimitz used get to the heart of the matter, and discard matters that were non-usable, or lacked appropriate importance. General Henry "Hap" Arnold had a meeting with the Fleet Admiral to discuss a perceived lack of support for the Army Air Force by CINCPAC. After the meeting General Arnold wrote: "After this conference with Admiral Nimitz, it finally dawned on me that most of the Air Force problems, difficulties, and complications were the result of junior officers' magnifying something of relative unimportance and making it a great matter."⁴⁸ As Potter emphasizes: "Arnold learned, as many another officer had done, that Nimitz was stubborn in opposition only to what was irrational, time-wasting, or unjust."⁴⁹

After Pearl Harbor, the country needed someone who could pick up the pieces and fight. A former fleet admiral, upon his return from a presidential mission to Pearl Harbor at the end of December in 1941, put it most succinctly, "By God, I used to say

a man had to be both a fighter and know how to fight. Now all I want is a man who fights."⁵⁰ That was Admiral Nimitz's vision in executing the war in the Pacific theater. Keegan aptly wrote, "In Admiral Chester Nimitz, appointed to command the Pacific Fleet on 17 December, the United States would find a man - as Lincoln did in Grant - who would fight."⁵¹

The strategic objectives for the Pacific theater were often laid out by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with Admiral King, as CNO, being most influential. Hoyt describes this process:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff entrusted general supervision to Admiral King, and Admiral Nimitz presented his plans to Admiral King, who then approved, embroidered, or disapproved. Usually he approved the major part of the plan, but made some alterations of his own.⁵²

During the war, Admiral Nimitz met with Admiral King on eighteen separate occasions to discuss strategy, in addition to personnel and equipment requirements. Although the strategic ends (direction and objectives) for the war plan in the Pacific was not Nimitz's alone, the ways and means, and especially their melding - the execution - were all his. As Admiral E.M. Eller, Director of Naval History in 1970, wrote, "A single man emerges ... Admiral Chester W. Nimitz as history will record him - the wise, calm tower of strength in adversity and success, the principle architect of the victory in the Pacific in World War II."⁵³

It was important as background to note how Nimitz and King often worked together on the strategic planning for the Pacific, but in discussing Admiral Nimitz's vision I will look at his overarching theory and approach to victory. This provides a more appropriate strategic view, as opposed to the operational aspect of 'theater plans' and individual campaigns. His expertise at the latter can be verified with a single example - Midway. Eric Larrabee specifies; "Midway was Nimitz's great battle. He planned it, he picked its commander, he ordered it executed."⁵⁴ The importance of Midway to the overall victory in the Pacific has already been noted, but its link to the nation's strategic war effort is worth noting, as Larrabee writes:

Without Nimitz's battle (Midway), Roosevelt's strategy would have been deeply imperiled. Defeat at Midway would have brought about exactly that concentration of the major effort against Japan that the President was so firmly seeking to avoid, and would have postponed victory - if total victory was still within reach - for an unprecedented period of harsh and costly fighting.⁵⁵

Japan was an island nation, dependent on her sea-lanes of communication for survival, and therefore dependent upon her Navy. Japan knew this - she ushered us into the war by attempting to eliminate our Pacific fleet. And Nimitz knew this - since the early days of his Naval career he studied and prepared for a war with Japan. He also understood that victory over Japan would first require the defeat of the Japanese Navy.⁵⁶

Nimitz planned to employ a 'Mahanian' strategy - strike at Japan's bases, lines of communication, and whenever possible striking for the destruction of her Navy - to ultimately gain command of the sea.⁵⁷ This could only be accomplished by going on the offensive, the guiding principle behind all of Nimitz actions.

From the beginning, even when severely outnumbered and many Navy flag officers considered it "too risky," Nimitz employed his most powerful offensive weapon, his carrier battlegroups. He utilized the aircraft carrier's long-range attack capability to raid Japanese bases, and seek destruction of the Imperial fleet whenever possible. As previously mentioned, Admiral Nimitz effectively communicated his offensive approach to his commanders by authorizing them to utilize "calculated risk" to determine if they could inflict "greater damage on the enemy."

To carry this out, Nimitz had to find commanders who would help him take his fight to the Japanese.⁵⁸ He found them in Admirals William "Bull" Halsey and Raymond Spruance. It was Spruance who may have best described Nimitz's approach to the war; "The one big thing was that he was always ready to fight ... And he wanted officers who would push the fight with the Japanese. If they would not do so they were sent elsewhere."⁵⁹ And this was exactly what he did when he relieved Admiral Robert Ghormley as Commander, Third Fleet, in the South Pacific prior

to the recapture of Guadalcanal. In Admiral Nimitz words, the relief was because: "Ghormley was ... not sufficiently bold and aggressive at the right times."⁶⁰ Ghormley's replacement was "Bull" Halsey.

To enable the American fleet to remain at sea for months at a time, as compared to weeks for other fleets, Nimitz formed two mobile service squadrons in the Central Pacific (his most vast operational area),⁶¹ and fully utilized underway replenishment - the concept he himself had pioneered. Always looking for ways to press the offensive, after fighting ended in the South Pacific Nimitz combined the 3rd and 5th fleets to create a huge striking force. To help maintain the most rapid pace of offensive operations he alternated Halsey and Spruance as the strike force commanders - one attacking, as the other planned the follow-on campaign.⁶² To further attack Japan and her lines of communication, Nimitz employed an unprecedented submarine effort against Japanese shipping. The Pacific fleet's submarine warfare sunk 1,314 Japanese vessels, for a total loss of 5.3 million tons - Nimitz accounted for 55 percent of Japanese maritime losses utilizing only 2 percent of his assets.⁶³ Admiral Nimitz followed through on his vision and "took the fight" to the Japanese.

TECHNICAL COMPETENCIES

I consider the technical competencies to be more applicable to today's national strategic-level leaders than to a WW II warfighting CINC. I will therefore give little emphasis to them, with the exception of the leader's ability to perform in a joint and combined environment.

At the outbreak of World War II, Admiral Nimitz, then the Chief of Naval Personnel, had his only opportunity to operate in the national political arena. In that capacity he was very effective "on the hill" obtaining congressional approval of the measures he needed to man a wartime Navy.⁶⁴ As a theater CINC - during wartime, Admiral Nimitz did not have the opportunity, nor was it his place, to become involved in national level political issues. He was though, very effective at utilizing Admiral King, and if necessary Secretary Knox, to bring strategic or programmatic issues to the appropriate light, that required approval outside his chain of command. Nimitz also used Admiral King's relationship and access to General Marshall when he encountered inter-service difficulties within the "dual-commanded" Pacific theater.⁶⁵

As previously mentioned, Nimitz was extremely demanding of his commanders and kept only the best to be on his "first team."⁶⁶ And Nimitz demanded jointness from his commanders. Prior to the Tarawa campaign, Nimitz called together his senior

commanders - Navy, Army, and Marine - and communicated the importance of jointness for the operation; "If I hear one case of a naval officer not giving required help to the Army ashore, I will immediately relieve him."⁶⁷ No questions were asked.

As the war progressed, and his theater got more "joint", Nimitz made two major changes to accommodate. In the summer of 1943, Nimitz needed an improvement to his current supply system - which couldn't contend with the growing complexity and expanse of the Pacific theater.⁶⁸ Nimitz saw the advantages of the Army system of supply, with its, as Hoyt puts it, "constant infusion of supply, and a planning and delivery network as complex as the fighting system itself"⁶⁹ - and adopted it. In September 1943, he set up a true joint theater headquarters at Pearl Harbor that initially had four directorates; Plans (J-1), Intelligence (J-2), Operations (J-3), and Logistics (J-4).⁷⁰

With the Pacific being secondary to Europe as a theater of war, there was little, or no, occasion to operate combined. But when the opportunity presented itself Nimitz was eager, as well as effective. During planning for the Guadalcanal campaign, Admiral Nimitz saw an opportunity to utilize New Zealand troops. When he questioned Admiral Ghormley (3rd Fleet Commander at that time and in charge of the operation) about the possibility, Ghormley could only provide negatives. Nimitz responded, "If we can't find a formula for using them, it is Japan's gain. We

should use all resources that are available to us."⁷¹ Throughout the brief Ghormley's pessimism persisted, causing Nimitz to close the meeting by emphasizing, "I repeat again - if we can't use our allies, we are damned fools."⁷² As I've already mentioned, Admiral Ghormley wasn't around for the end of the Guadalcanal campaign.

In March of 1945, the British offered a task force to operate in the upcoming campaign at Okinawa. The British force was comprised of four carriers, two battleships, five cruisers, and eleven destroyers, along with all required service and supply assets. Admiral Nimitz was fully aware of the advantages, as well as the limitations, presented by incorporating the British assets. Nimitz's main concern was the on-station capacity of the British fleet - if it was considerably shorter than that of his own fleet, they would be of minimal utility. Nimitz brought this up during his first meeting with Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, CINC of the British Fleet. When Admiral Fraser estimated that his fleet could remain at sea for eight days out of a month, Nimitz said that was not satisfactory. As to the final outcome, Nimitz commented, "Admiral Fraser and I had a long conference ... He felt he could operate for eight days a month, and we compromised on twenty."⁷³ With this important issue solved, Nimitz assigned the British fleet to Admiral Spruance for the operation. Spruance used them to form a special Task Force,

which effectively covered the assault forces from Japanese aircraft attack from their bases on the islands between Okinawa and Formosa.

INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES

Some historians consider Nimitz's communicative and interpersonal skills to be his most outstanding attributes. Hoyt says that Nimitz "achieved his ends more by persuasion and inspiration to men under his command ... Nimitz ... was a man very conscious of a destiny and of his part in the war to be won, as a leader of men."⁷⁴ As such, his ever-calm, purposefully cool, and calculating personality served as his, greatest weapon against the Japanese. Here a comparison between Nimitz and Admiral King, himself a great strategist and essential to America's winning war effort, provides an excellent perspective to the importance of Nimitz's interpersonal skills. Larrabee, in comparing the personalities of the two Fleet Admirals, said, "King could not have achieved what Nimitz did and there were virtues in Nimitz that fell outside King's range of comprehension: humility, diplomacy, accessibility."⁷⁵

Working directly under Admiral King, and sharing and AOR with General MacArthur, both men of near legendary toughness and difficulty, Nimitz had to be a highly effective negotiator and consensus builder, and proved himself so. And as Potter

emphasizes, Nimitz understood "... that World War II was far too complex for any one man in any theater of operations to do all the high-level thinking,"⁷⁶ and that it would require shared thoughts and efforts. In his eighteen meetings with Admiral King, negotiation and compromise was always necessary. I've already mentioned his persuasion of King, and MacArthur, that Midway would be Japan's next target in the summer of 1942. This is but one example where Nimitz prevailed. With King, the overall score was fairly equal. Nimitz's relationship with King was effective only because of Nimitz's keen interpersonal skills and abilities. Hoyt felt that Nimitz's performance was remarkable, "one that could not have be accomplished by many men."⁷⁷ How Nimitz made it work can best be summarized by two additional quotes from Hoyt. In their relationship, Nimitz fully understood his position. "When King said loudly and clearly that it was being done, and would be done, then Nimitz simply put the matter from his mind, showed King that he had done so, and did not let the matter affect any other aspect of their relationship."⁷⁸ But on the other hand, "Nimitz knew precisely the length to which he could go (with King) without beginning the erosion of confidence that would eventually lead to Nimitz's own replacement and self-defeat."⁷⁹

Nimitz and MacArthur also shared a "give-and-take" relationship. On 3 April 1944, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)

determined that for the final invasion of Japan, MacArthur would command all army ground and air forces in the Pacific, and Nimitz would command all naval forces. They also ordered that the current campaigns would continue under the old command structure. MacArthur couldn't wait, and on 13 April made a proposal to Nimitz that he (MacArthur) take complete control of all army forces immediately, to include the island garrisons in the Pacific Ocean Area.⁸⁰ In Nimitz's words, "these ideas were consuming valuable time and delaying constructive planning."⁸¹ To expedite resolution, Nimitz sent a communication to MacArthur stipulating what he would and would not do. This, along with further compromise proposals from Nimitz, still left the issue unresolved, as MacArthur remained unyielding. This is just one encounter with MacArthur, but it shows that Nimitz, even though he had a JCS directive on his side and clearly stood to win (MacArthur ultimately did not obtain control of the army forces at that time), he was still willing to negotiate.

Since command is not a democratic process, Nimitz was equally adept at knowing when not to compromise. He himself said, "We are out to win a war, not please individuals."⁸² When planning the invasion of the Marshall Islands, Nimitz assigned Kwajalein Island as the objective. He was alone in preferring Kwajalein, as Admirals Spruance, Richmond K. Turner, and Holland Smith all recommended attacking the islands of Wotje and Maleolap first.

Spruance and Turner were particularly adamant and determined, staying after their meeting to plead their case. Nimitz listened, but finally said:

Sitting behind desks in the United States are able officers who would give their right arms to be out here fighting the war. If you gentlemen can't bring yourselves to carry out my orders, I can arrange an exchange of duty with stateside officers who can. Make up your minds. You have five minutes. Do you want to do it or not?⁸³

They both went on to fight in the Marshall Islands campaign. Kwajalein was taken so quickly and with so few casualties, that Spruance continued on the offensive with an assault on Enitwetok - a campaign that was originally scheduled to start only after a month or two lay off after Kwajalein.⁸⁴

Being truly a joint leader, he had a similar opportunity to motivate one of his army commanders. During the attack on Okinawa, the naval forces off shore providing gunfire support were under extremely heavy attack, to include kamikaze attacks, from the Japanese. The slow advance of the army forces therefore concerned Nimitz - the quicker the campaign was over, the sooner the Navy could be released from their precarious situation.⁸⁵ When Nimitz approached General Simon Bolivar Buckner, the army commander, he told Nimitz that it was a ground battle, and the tactics were strictly Army business - and basically none of his. With that, Nimitz responded:

Yes, but ground though it may be, I'm losing a ship and a half a day. So if this line isn't moving within five days, we'll get someone here to move it, so we can all get out from under these stupid air attacks.⁸⁶

Buckner quickly transferred two Marine divisions to the main combat area to help advance the fight. During the three-month campaign, the Navy had twenty-six ships sunk and 368 damaged (including six carriers), many beyond salvage.⁸⁷ Ever the diplomat, Nimitz acted quickly to keep this interservice rivalry issue from marring the campaign. Soon after the disagreement he held a press conference to praise the Army and its operation at Okinawa - ending the controversy and avoiding any interservice problems.⁸⁸

Nimitz's superb communicative skills should already be evident, but one medium Nimitz avoided was the press. Some might suggest that this is an area that a strategic leader should exploit to his advantage, but it was an institutional, a Navy, decision to do just the opposite. The Navy had a strong argument in avoiding the press, and publicity. They felt that fleet operations required more secrecy than land operations.⁸⁹ One example was the 'nonsinking' of the carrier YORKTOWN at the Battle of Coral Sea. The Japanese believed that they had in fact sunk YORKTOWN, and therefore made plans for attacking Midway based on that fact. Had they known the truth, their plans would most assuredly have changed. The Japanese didn't

know the truth about YORKTOWN because the Navy kept the facts of ship movements and damage from the press.⁹⁰ D. Clayton James, in *Makers of Modern Strategy* lends credence to the Navy's fears:

Not only were Japanese military strategists late in setting a higher priority on the Pacific, but they also misjudged which of the American-led advances was the more menacing. General Douglas MacArthur's self-promotion helped to make him the first major American hero of war, but his publicity campaign and his first successes in the field also led Tokyo to focus more on defensive measures against the Southwest Pacific advance than on countering the moves of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz's forces in the Central Pacific.⁹¹

Nimitz in fact, sided with the other senior Navy leadership on this issue. Early in 1942 when hoards of reporters descended on Pearl Harbor, he wanted the Office of War Information to know that he considered the release of information to the press the same as giving it directly to the enemy.⁹² But beyond this, he saw another negative aspect, he felt that the publicity took on a life of its own, even taking away from the war and those who fought it. In the spring of 1945 he said, "The publicity side of the war is getting so large, it almost overshadows the fighting side."⁹³ And Nimitz's avoidance of the press in no way detracted from his performance as a warfighting CINC, or the war effort - in fact it may have supported it.

CONCLUSION

I gave my bottom line conclusion over twenty pages ago - Admiral Nimitz was one of the greatest strategic leaders of the

twentieth century, and master of our 1990's strategic leadership competencies. His leadership skills and abilities were obtained through a lifetime of learning and experience, and were significant enough to set him apart from his World War II contemporaries. To this point I have relied upon the opinion of historical experts, over my own, in documenting Admiral Nimitz's expertise. I will therefore end with quotes from two such men. Chosen from many, these speak directly to Admiral Nimitz's strategic leadership competencies, abilities, and performance. In closing his chapter on Nimitz, Charles Pfannes wrote:

This modest quiet compassionate man was by far one of America's greatest military leaders. His personality bred confidence, which caused America's leadership to turn to him in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. He promptly picked up the pieces and brought his nation through to victory. Nimitz successfully conducted a war in the world's largest theater as he moved ships of fantastic might and handled subordinates who were frequently difficult to handle. Chester W. Nimitz, the blond-headed boy from Texas, served his country well and left America with a legacy of which it is proud.⁹⁴

After Nimitz's death, President Truman - under whom Nimitz served as a World War II Commander-in-Chief, then as Chief of Naval Operations, and finally as a United Nations emissary - wrote:

I came to regard Admiral Nimitz from the outset as a man apart and above all his contemporaries - as a strategist, as a leader and as a person. I ranked him with General George Marshall as military geniuses as well as statesmen.⁹⁵

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ENDNOTES

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³ Roderick R. Magee II and Brehon B. Somervell, Strategic Leadership Primer (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College), 37.

⁴ Department of Defense, Universal Joint Task List, CJCSM 3500.04A (Washington D.C.: Department of Defense, 13 September 1996), 2-1.

⁵ DoD, UJTL, 2-1.

⁶ DoD, UJTL, 2-2.

⁷ DoD, UJTL, 2-3.

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⁹ Edwin P. Hoyt, How They Won the War in the Pacific: Nimitz and His Admirals (New York, NY: Weybright and Talley, 1970), 134.

¹⁰ Burckhardt, 284.

¹¹ Magee and Somervell, 37.

¹² Magee and Somervell, 37.

¹³ Department of the Army, Strategic Leadership, Draft Field Manual 22-103, in Leading and Managing in the Strategic Arena, A Reference Text, 1996-1997 (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 1996), 49.

¹⁴ Magee and Somervell, 36-37.

¹⁵ Magee and Somervell, 38.

¹⁶ Magee and Somervell, 39.

¹⁷ Thomas E. Cronin, "Reflections on Leadership," in Military Leadership, ed. William E. Rosenbach and Robert L. Taylor (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 18.

¹⁸ Magee and Somervell, 40.

¹⁹ Magee and Somervell, 40.

²⁰ DoA, Strategic Leadership, Draft Field Manual 22-103, 100.

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²⁵ Magee and Somervell, 44.

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- ²⁷ Potter, 129.
- ²⁸ Potter, 141.
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- ³³ Samuel Eliot Morison, History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume III, The Rising Sun in the Pacific (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 256-257.
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- ⁴⁰ John Keegan, The Price of Admiralty (New York, NY: Viking Penguin Inc., 1989), 188-189.
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